

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH MR. BAKER

Mr. Baker is coming to see you tomorrow to discuss the unhappy saga of the reorganisation of the Ilkeston schools. You have still outstanding the reply to Mr. Rost's letter. You wanted to talk with Mr. Baker before sending the department's draft below. You wondered whether the letter might not conclude with an extra paragraph drawing Mr. Rost's attention to the opting-out facility in the Education Bill now before Parliament.

I have suggested something on the following lines to Mr. Baker's Office:

"I know that you will be aware of the provisions in the Education Reform Bill which allow schools to opt out of the local authority control. Parents unhappy with the re-organisation may wish to consider whether they would wish to use this provision in the legislation when it is on the statute book. I know that the Department would be very ready to consider speedily and promptly, in a way compatible with the legislation, any proposals which might come forward."

Mr. Baker also wishes to discuss with you his proposal to establish a Committee on "violence in schools" (his minute at flag A) on which Andy records your comments in his letter to the DES at flag B.

Finally, Brian has submitted an interesting note at flag C on some disturbing goings-on in the Mathematics Curriculum Working Party. You will see that Brian recommends that Mr. Baker should go out of his way to produce a totally independent list of appointees to the National Curriculum Council.

N.L.W.

N. L. WICKS

18 February 1988

PMMARY





Keep this

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your letter of 28 December, enclosing one from Mr. A. J. Bridges about the reorganisation of schools in the Ilkeston area of Derbyshire. I am sorry that I have not replied before now, but I wanted to look into the background very carefully. This I have now done.

I fully understand your concern about achieving the best possible education for pupils in Ilkeston and your determination to put forward the views of your constituents on Derbyshire LEA's plans. I know how forcefully you have argued your constituent's case to Kenneth Baker and I understand your continuing anxiety.

As you know, under the provisions of the Education Act 1980 Local Education Authorities are empowered to make proposals for the reorganisation of their provision of schools and it is the duty of the Secretary of State for Education and Science to consider any such proposals on their merits. The Derbyshire proposals, once published, were looked at very carefully, not only against the need for Education Authorities to respond to the immediate and long term effects of sharply falling age groups, but also against the consideration that Kenneth Baker would not normally be prepared to approve the closure of a school of proven worth unless there was evidence that it could not continue to sustain its established quality and that the proposals for change would secure at least the same quality and variety of education at lower cost.



As regards the events leading to the Department's letter to the Authority of 18 December, I understand that you have already spoken to Kenneth Baker and that he has explained to you why he felt obliged to authorise that that letter should be sent. I very much regret the misunderstandings and confusions which have arisen, and I appreciate that you would welcome a different decision. But, like Kenneth, I must accept the legal position. Now that Derbyshire's reorganisation proposals have been approved, there is no power left to Kenneth to reverse that approval. Consequently there is no room for me to intervene.

Peter Rost, Esq., M.P.





10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

9 February 1988

*Dear Tom,*

RE-ORGANISATION OF SCHOOLS IN ILKESTON, DERBYSHIRE

Thank you for your letter of 8 February about this matter.

The Prime Minister would like to discuss this matter with your Secretary of State and we will arrange a meeting for early next week after the European Council.

You should know that the Prime Minister is considering adding an extra paragraph at the end of the letter drawing Mr. Rost's attention to the opting-out facility in the Education Bill now before Parliament. She may wish to suggest to Mr. Rost that parents unhappy with the re-organisation may wish to consider taking advantage of these provisions and they can rest assured that the Department would use its good offices to that end in a way compatible with the legislation. I suggest that your Secretary of State should come to the meeting with a form of words. Something on the following lines might be suitable:

"I know that you will be aware of the provisions in the Education Reform Bill which allow schools to opt out of local authority control. Parents unhappy with the re-organisation may wish to consider whether they would wish to use this provision in the legislation when it is on the statute book. I know that the Department would be very ready to consider speedily and promptly, in a way compatible with the legislation, any proposals which might come forward."

*Yours truly*  
*Nigel Wicks*

N. L. WICKS

Tom Jeffery, Esq.,  
Department of Education and Science.